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DIALOGIC, PARTICIPATION AND THE POTENTIAL FOR PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN

Abstract

This paper considers the role of dialogue in the participation of children and examines the extent to which Philosophy for Children can be conceptualised as a dialogic participatory mechanism. It examines ways in which dialogue has been linked to participation in the literature and differentiates between those approaches which focus on dialogue as pedagogic device and those which emphasise its participatory potential. A theoretical exploration of dialogue is pursued using three questions to interrogate the complex and contested body of literature exploring dialogic approaches. These focus on the possibility that dialogue offers an alternative philosophical approach to children's voice, mechanisms of transformation in dialogic encounters, and the problems posed by inequality between dialogic partners. This exploration prepares the ground to consider Philosophy for Children's potential as a dialogical participatory mechanism. It is concluded that where practitioners are able to tolerate the perplexity and discomfort of genuinely open dialogue, then Philosophy for Children can be regarded as dialogic. It is recognised that the many competing agendas operating in schools might influence the extent to which dialogue can remain open. If Philosophy for Children is to operate as a participatory mechanism, then it is argued that there is a need to develop a praxis focus within communities of philosophical inquiry. Political difficulties resulting from inequalities between the participants in a community of inquiry are acknowledged. It is concluded that practitioners need to adopt and maintain critical reflexivity if they are to avoid an instrumental approach to the practice of Philosophy for Children and ensure that its dialogic and participatory potential is developed.

Keywords: participation, dialogic, children's voice, Philosophy for Children,

1. Introduction

1.1 Focus

Recent interest in dialogic approaches in education is reflected in a growing literature. This interest has been largely directed towards enhancing children's learning (Mercer and Middleton, 2007;Wegerif, 2007), however dialogic approaches have also been suggested as a means to support citizenship education (Deakin Crick, Coates, Taylor and Ritchie, 2004), and to facilitate children's participation (Fielding, 2004, Hill, Davis, Prout and Tidsall, 2004). This paper specifically explores what dialogic approaches might offer those working towards greater participative involvement of children. It also considers the extent to which Philosophy for Children, as one particular approach to involving children in dialogue, might be conceptualised as a dialogic, participatory mechanism.

1.2 Dialogic approaches to children's participation

The following discussion explores the transformative potential of dialogic approaches. The possibility of transformation is likely to capture the interest of those seeking to work with children in ways which are genuinely participatory. If practices around participation lack transformative potential, then it can be argued, they are open to charges of tokenism. Concern has been raised about the current emphasis on children's 'voice' and it has been suggested that 'voice' alone has limited transformative potential (Lundy, 2007). Fielding (2004), contends that including previously silenced voices is not necessarily empowering. Traditional epistemologies, in his view, are unable to capture

the voices required. The inability of objectivist epistemologies to take account of subjectivities has been a matter of debate particularly within the discipline of psychology (Sampson, 1981). Objectivist approaches to children's voice can be viewed as problematic as they do not take account of the differences between children in terms of their experiences. If children represent diverse groups then in selecting only some voices others are silenced. Extreme relativist approaches, such as those underpinning critical voice research however encounter other difficulties (Arnot and Reay, 2007). Such approaches, it is argued, merely celebrate the diversity of voices and are ultimately politically impotent (Moore and Muller, 1999).

Fielding (2004), responding to the difficulties identified with critical voice work, suggests that dialogic approaches go beyond 'voice' and therefore make an important contribution to children's participation. Others writing in this area also consider the potential of dialogic approaches (Hill, Davis, Prout and Tidsall, 2004; Fattore and Turnbull, 2005). This paper therefore explores what dialogic approaches offers participatory practice by providing a critical theoretical exploration of dialogic approaches, their potential for transformation and some of the difficulties which might be encountered.

1.2 Philosophy for Children

The paper also builds on this exploration to consider the extent to which Philosophy for Children can be conceptualised as a dialogic, participatory mechanism. Todd (2007), suggests Philosophy for Children as an example of 'authentic participation' (p147).

Philosophy for Children was developed by Matthew Lipman based on the Socratic tradition of dialogue. The classroom becomes a community of inquiry focused on exploration and questioning (McGuiness, 2005). All discussion in Philosophy for Children sessions is generated through children's questions in response to stimuli such as poems, pictures or stories. Democratic processes determine which questions are given most discussion time and the teacher's role within the discussion is facilitative rather than authoritative (Haynes, 2002). It was established as an educational programme in the 1970s, but has received more attention in the last decade (Vansieleghem, 2005).

Philosophy for Children emphasises logic and criticality and has been identified as a key thinking skills approach (McGuiness, 2005). Research evidence links it to gains in ability and attainment (Trickey and Topping, 2004; Topping and Trickey, 2007), and to positive shifts in pupil interactions within the classroom (Topping and Trickey, 2007). The link to gains in ability as measured by increased IQ scores, may be of particular interest to educators given that IQ scores predict individual differences in school attainment 'moderately well' (Neisser et al., 1996). The link between gains in IQ scores and Philosophy for Children has prompted media interest in the development of Philosophy for Children in schools in two local authorities in Scotland (Cook, 2007; Denholme, 2008). Although these findings have generated interest and enthusiasm for Philosophy for Children, it is also possible that the focus on the impact on individual cognitive skills might narrow theoretical interest in the processes involved in philosophical dialogue in classrooms. Wegerif (2008), considers research on the impact of exploratory talk on children's reasoning ability as measured by Raven's matrices. He

argues that the ground rules of exploratory talk (similar to those of Philosophy for Children) are important in opening up 'space' for reflection which enables the emergence of a creative approaches to problem solving. Wegerif argues therefore that there is a need for research which look at how to enhance the 'creative quality of relationships'. This can be applied to research in the Philosophy for Children.

Although Philosophy for Children is currently best known as a thinking skills approach, historically it has served a progressive educational agenda and has been argued to be important in the preparation of children for citizenship within a democratic society (Fisher, 2003; Vanseileghem, 2005). Philosophy for Children is an approach which is entirely focussed on dialogue. Todd's suggestion develops out of her wider theoretical consideration of participation but she does not provide a theoretical explanation of the specific role that dialogue might play in enhancing the participation of children through philosophical inquiry. Having explored the potential of dialogic approaches for the participation of children, this paper will go on to assess the extent to which Philosophy for Children can be conceptualised as a dialogic, participatory mechanism.

In order to address the central concerns of this paper, it is important to consider links between dialogue and participation. Section two will consider how dialogue has been linked to participation within the literature. Section three will explore theoretical considerations of dialogic approaches and will prepare the way for discussion in section four on the extent to which Philosophy for Children can be conceptualised as dialogic participatory mechanism.

SECTION 2 Participation and dialogue

2.1 Dialogue, Education and Children's Participation

The use of dialogue as an educational tool can be traced to Socrates (Renshaw, 2004). The Socratic tradition positions the teacher as facilitator in the student's search for evidence using a reasoned argument and has implications for power relations between teachers and learners. A more radical tradition, using dialogue to increase participation and shift power relations in education and in the wider society, can be seen in the work of adult literacy educators Paulo Freire, and Lorenzo Milani. Both Freire and Milani emphasised the role of dialogue in participation in their work (Mayo, 2007).

Dialogic approaches have more recently been emphasised as important to children's learning (Mercer and Littleton, 2007; Wegerif, 2007). The pedagogic role of dialogue has been extensively theorised. Explanations in this sphere have been based largely, although not exclusively, on sociocultural theory (Wegerif, 2007), and focus on children's intellectual progression. The potential impact of these approaches on power relationships within the classroom has been recognised (Mercer and Littleton, 2007).

Dialogic pedagogies have also been emphasised in a recent review of research on citizenship education (Deakin Crick, Coates, Taylor, and Ritchie, 2004). Deakin Crick et al., identify dialogue as a pedagogic approach which enables children to develop the skills required to participate as citizens in their adult lives.

Deakin Crick and Joldersma (2007), have developed a theoretical approach to citizenship education on the basis of Habermas's theory of society, which regards communication as central to participation in a democratic society. They recognise that Habermas's notion

of democracy widens the scope of political participation beyond the formal institutions of politics across social and cultural institutions and organisations, such as schools. They suggest the need for a 'transformative, dialogical and participatory' (p87) pedagogical approach in schools to support children's development and prepare them for participation in the various public arenas in which democracy is enacted. One difficulty with Deakin Crick and Joldersma's approach is its emphasis on citizenship education as a training ground for children's *future* participation. Habermas, it can be argued, construes children as 'becomings' (Christensen and Prout, 2002). He draws on psychoanalytic notions of ego development and Kohlberg's theory of moral development, to argue that children need to be socialized into democratic participation (Habermas 1979; Habermas, 1987). Deakin Crick and Joldersma (2007), like Habermas, appear to regard citizenship education as a means of developing tomorrow's citizens and schools as institutions of socialisation. Although dialogue features prominently in their approach, it is arguably viewed as a pedagogic rather than as a participatory device. This is demonstrated by their emphasis on the 'development' of skills (p78).

Hill, Davis, Prout, and Tidsall, (2004), contend that citizenship education in schools is problematic as it is often interpreted as a means of preparing children to exercise their adult rights, failing to see children as citizens in their own right. This is a distinction also picked up by Biesta in his consideration of education and democracy (Biesta, 2006). He argues that education *for* democracy involves teaching skills to prepare children for future participation in democratic life. Education *through* democracy however, involves the creation of democratic structures in schools, such as pupil councils, to facilitate

children's decision making. In Biesta's view, both approaches focus on how best to prepare children for the future. An education *through* democracy approach, affords a decision making role for children; however this has an educative rather than a political function. It is therefore argued that not all opportunities given to children to engage in decision making arenas are motivated by a desire to see them exercise political influence in their own right. Whitty and Wisby (2007), on the basis of a review of the literature and their own data, indicate that schools identify a number of reasons for including pupils in decision making exercises. They found few schools citing children's rights as the key driver for pupil participation. Consequently, when considering the role of dialogue to support the participation of children, it is important to make a distinction between approaches which develop the *skills* of children as future citizens and those which facilitate children's decision making rights in the present. This paper is concerned with the latter emphasis and therefore explores dialogic approaches for their participatory as opposed to their pedagogic potential.

2.2 Dialogue and Children's Active Participation in the Present

When the rights of children to participate in the here and now are emphasised, it can be argued that there is a need to focus on the development of *processes* which allow children to participate, rather than on the development of the *skills* needed by children in order to participate as adult citizens. The role of dialogue in such processes has been recognised in the literature on children's participation rights. Fattore and Turnbull (2005), argue that as children are able to engage in intersubjective

understandings with others, they can enter into inter-generational communication and that dialogue is therefore vital to their participation. They also draw on Habermas's theory of democracy and look at the social and cultural institutions and organisations that involve children. Fattore and Turnbull however do not view these as arenas for the development of children's skills. Rather, they see them as places where adults and children can engage in dialogic encounters. Such encounters can in turn enable the participation of children either through direct decision making functions or by ensuring that adults are more able to work on behalf of children in more formal political arenas. Hill et al. (2004), also emphasise dialogue as important to participatory processes. They cite the work of Moss and Petrie which conceptualises children's services as 'children's spaces'. Hill et al., suggest that this implies space for 'dialogue, confrontation, deliberation and critical thinking' (p. 84).

It is however important to critically consider what exactly dialogue can contribute to participatory processes as this has not been fully addressed in the literature discussed thus far. A fuller consideration of the role of dialogue is developed in the participatory research literature. Dialogue is a central feature of participatory research (van der Reit, 2008). Participatory research focuses on participation and action in the present (Park, 2001; O'Kane, 2000). In Fielding's (2004), discussion of participatory research with children, he emphasises the centrality of dialogic processes. He points in an interesting theoretical direction when he argues that it is not so much the content but that act of dialogue which offers hope. Fielding's discussion considers these processes in some detail. He argues that participatory research has the potential to shift the

perspective of both researcher and participants. The role of dialogue in shifting perspectives, and the potential this has for transformation in participatory research, has also been considered at an epistemological level in a helpful paper by van der Reijt (2008). It has already been contended that participatory activity must offer the potential for change for without this, it will be politically impotent. If dialogue is to offer anything to participatory practice then it must have transformative potential.

Having considered perspectives on children's participation and the emerging emphasis on dialogue, it is important now to consider dialogic mechanisms and their potential for participatory practice. The next section will therefore consider dialogic theory in order to explore its potential for participatory practice.

SECTION THREE

Theorising dialogic

3.1 Introduction and definitions

It is important to explore theoretical explanations of dialogue in order to understand how it might support participation. Consideration will be given initially to the ways in which dialogue and dialogic are defined within the literature.

Dialogue has aroused multi-disciplinary interest and a range of academic traditions has built up around the concept (Mifsud and Johnson, 2000; Renshaw, 2004). Mifsud and Johnson (2000), suggest that these traditions are built on differing paradigms and this

leads to variation in conceptualisations of dialogue and definitional confusion.

Wegerif (2007), observes that the term dialogic is used extensively but meanings vary.

He identifies four uses of dialogic:

- *pertaining to dialogue*: referring to the activity of shared inquiry.
- *texts which are not monologic*: the view that all texts contain multiple competing and cooperating voices
- *as epistemological paradigm* : where the meaning of an utterance resides in its location within a dialogue rather than in the utterance itself
- *as social ontology* : a philosophical position competing with modernist western notions of humans as bounded selves. The dialogic self is defined through dialogue with others.

For Wegerif (2008), grasping dialogic as ontology has immense practical significance.

The development of dialogic ontology has been heavily influenced by Bakhtin (Salgado and Hermans, 2005). Bakhtin's position is paradoxical and dialogic for him, involves the coming together of opposing positions, yet maintains the differences between them. The aim of dialogue from this perspective is not to reach a convergence of self and other in intersubjective agreement (Wegerif, 2007). Wegerif defines 'dialogic space' as "a space in which different perspectives are held in tension in a way which does not lead to resolution but produces sparks of insight, learning and creativity" (p118). Dialogic ontology is based on the interplay of same-different/self- other which neither leads to fusion, nor to the maintenance of difference as a 'stand-off' position. Dialogic is

continuously dynamic and open. In this way, Markova (2003), argues that a dialogic ontology is able to account for ‘innovation, creativity and change’ (p255). It is this transformative aspect of a dialogical approach, as discussed above, which has particular significance to participation practices. This will be explored now through a more detailed consideration of the literature in this area.

3.2 Dialogic theory, possibilities and problems

In an attempt to steer a course through this complex and contested area the following questions will be used to interrogate the literature:

1. can dialogic approaches offer a solution to the problems of the tyrannies of objectivist approaches to children’s voice and the fragmentation of critical voice work ?
2. By what mechanisms might dialogic encounters lead to transformation?
3. What is the impact on dialogic relations where there are power differences between partners?

The first question arises from issues raised in the introduction regarding the philosophical difficulties emerging from the literature on ‘voice’ and considers the extent to which dialogic approaches might overcome these problems. The second question concerns the transformative potential of dialogue and the processes involved in this. The final question enables consideration of the problems of the politics of dialogue and is of particular practical significance.

The problems posed by objectivism and extreme relativism have been discussed in the literature on selfhood, by scholars such as Hermans and Markova (Salgado and Hermans, 2005). In their theoretical development of a dialogical self, they provide a

bridge between these extremes. If knowledge is assumed to exist only within categories of knowers, then there is neither basis for communication nor genuine purpose in participative exercises. If an objectivist position is assumed however, then subjectivities are ignored and children's experiential differences are not captured. Markova, like Fattore and Turnbull (2005), suggests that intersubjectivity allows a closing of the distance between self and others. She argues however that if communication is to lead to change, creativity or innovation, then there must be more to it than intersubjectivity. It is her contention that dialogue goes beyond mutuality thus avoids the self being subsumed within the subjectivities of the other. She adopts a Bakhtinian position, arguing that dialogic participants are 'co-authors' of their ideas and that "co-authorship demands evaluation of the other, struggle with the other and judgement of the message of the other" (Markova, 2003, p256).

It is the contention of this paper, that Markova's view on the limits of intersubjectivity to an understanding of dialogic processes is extremely helpful. Markova's position allows for evaluation and judgement of the perspective of the other. This is not the judgement or evaluation of a bounded, imperialistic self. It is a position which recognises the fluidity of the boundaries between self and others and therefore allows the possibility of personal transformation of both self and other (Markova, 2003). For Markova, dialogic approaches make communication both meaningful and transformative. This theoretical position is of relevance to those considering how to develop processes which are open to children's participation, as opposed to developing children's skills in order to prepare them for future participation in existing processes. This position adds

theoretical weight to calls from writers such as Hill et al. (2004), for the central positioning of dialogic approaches in participatory practice.

This leads directly to the second question which concerns transformative mechanisms within dialogic encounters. Here the literature is particularly complex and definitions contested. Wegerif (2008), for example makes much of the distinction between dialogic and dialectic mechanisms of change. Poonamallee (2006), argues that the key distinction between dialectic and dialogic is that in a dialectical approach equilibrium is established through a synthesis borne from the fusion of conflicting positions, whereas a dialogic ontology assumes a reality in a continuous state of flux. This flux is the result of the continuous negotiation between different voices in dialogue.

Markova's notion of a dialogic self, is important as it avoids fusion of the other with the self in the dialogic encounter. Wegerif (2007), argues that for some postmodernist thinkers, making a distinction between dialogic and dialectic is crucial, as in dialectic where two opposing positions are synthesized, self can subsume other in a 'totalising system of explanation and control' (p 35). Vasterling (2003), similarly argues that a dialectic mechanism of change is problematic. For her, "recognition of plurality and other is important because it enables the critical function of open dialogue" (p167). It can be argued that in reaching synthesis through a dialectic process, otherness is defeated, dialogue shuts down and there is no mechanism for self critique and change.

Mifsud and Johnson (2000), identify dialectics with an epistemological position which assumes that some truth about reality is known before the dialogue takes place. This understanding of dialectic, explains Wegerif's (2007), description of Freire as dialectic

as opposed to dialogic. Freire, influenced by Marx, used dialogue to dispel 'false consciousness' and motivate students to action. In using Philosophy for Children, or any other tool to facilitate participation, it might appear that there is a desired end point. The truth that is 'known' before the dialogue takes place, is that children are marginalized. Any approach which uses dialogue explicitly as an emancipatory tool would by this reckoning be dialectic as opposed to dialogic.

There is confusion however as some of the literature, particularly in the area of participatory research (for example, van der Reijt, 2008), uses both dialectic and dialogic in explaining the mechanisms of change. For some writers however, the distinction between these two processes of change may not be as sharp as suggested by Wegerif. Mifsud and Johnson (2000), writing from within the discipline of communication, argue that the terms dialogic and dialectic are not so easily distinguished. They demonstrate from examples in recent thinking within their discipline, that dialectic does not necessarily imply synthesis or overcoming tensions or that dialogue ever closes down. They cite Baxter, who uses the term 'dialectical dialogue' (p94), to describe this more open conceptualisation of dialectic processes.

Kennedy's (1999), distinction between teleological and non-teleological approaches to dialogue is similarly complex. He examines Socratic dialogue using these concepts. Kennedy draws on a distinction developed by Burbules and suggests that 'teleological' dialogue (p346) assumes a resolution which can be known in advance and can be led to by a skilled facilitator. 'Non-teleological' dialogue however does not assume that a

resolution will be reached. If dialogue takes place in a way which does not subsume the 'otherness' of others in a synthesis, then there can be no resolution and dialogue will remain open and live.

In response to the question of the mechanisms by which dialogue might facilitate change, distinctions between dialectic and dialogic mechanisms are somewhat unclear due to varieties of definition across disciplines. The extent to which dialogue remains open and maintains a critical function so that both self and other (s) are provided with a 'catalyst for distancing and critical reflection' (van der Reijt, 2008, p 557), is crucial. This is how dialogical space is understood. It is not merely creating space or time for dialogue to take place. Kennedy (1999), argues that dialogue is much more than ideas. Dialogic space from the perspective of a dialogic ontology, is the space which opens up between persons, whose boundaries are fluid and in constant negotiation.

It is this fluidity which 'opens a space of transformative potential' (Kennedy, 1999, p 340). Thus it contains the possibility of future action or improvement and is thus crucial to genuine participatory practice. If dialogue is being used as a vehicle to reach a specific direction, such as in the work of Freire, then the dialogue is teleological and depending on one's definition, dialectical. Approaches to participation which involve education *through* participation, as discussed above, can be argued to involve teleological dialogue, as there is a clear aim for the activity. This aim is to train children through dialogue for skills which will enable them to participate in the future. Where adults and children engage in dialogue as part of an activity that accepts children's right to participative decision making in the present, then it can be argued that the agenda remains open and the dialogue is non-teleological. From this it can be

argued that the most important aspect of dialogue is the extent to which the views of the partners are held in tension and allowed to spark off each other in ways which lead to creativity and transformation.

For some however, true dialogic encounter requires the engagement of equals in the dialogic process (Vasterling, 2003). This leads to the third question and examines the implications of power differences between dialogic partners. Where children are being considered this is an important issue. Power differentials between children and adults are well theorised in the sociology of childhood. Hill (2006), on this basis, emphasises the need to recognise the political context within which participatory activities take place. The political context includes power differentials between adults and children but also between children themselves. As noted above, children's voices are not necessarily harmonious as they emerge from very different experiences. Bernstein (as cited in Arnot and Reay, 2007), recognises these difficulties in relation to pupil voice work when he contends that there is a need to consider how voices are produced and reproduced in the classroom. This is an explicit acknowledgement of the impact of wider inequalities on children's experiences. On this basis, Arnot and Reay (2007), warn against the naïve assumption that eliciting pupil talk in the classroom will, of itself, shift existing power relations.

The work of Moghaddam (2003) is of relevance here and can be used to challenge Fattore and Turnbull's emphasis on intersubjectivity in the participation of children. For Moghadden, intersubjectivity is limited in its explanatory power because it does not

explain at the inter-group level and ‘fails to incorporate power inequalities’ (p 224). He argues that intersubjectivity must be balanced with what he terms ‘interobjectivity’. Interobjectivity refers to the understandings of objective reality that are shared between individuals and groups, and between groups. Moghaddam bases his position on empirical work in social psychology (mainly in the Social Identity Theory), which demonstrates that more powerful groups and individuals are able to “‘help’ shape understandings of the world held by those with less power.”(p 224). His work encourages consideration of the ways in which power differentials between groups can shape their understandings of the world.

Dialogic encounters, it was argued above, have transformative potential as they allow both self and other to engage in critical reflection. Vasterling (2003), writing from a feminist perspective, questions the critical potential of the I-other relationship where there is inequality between the partners. Using the example of marital rape, she argues that legal change is sometimes needed to achieve what dialogue alone is unable to achieve. She argues that where there are significant inequalities, that dialogue is powerless and legislative responses are required to support the voice of the subjugated other. Accepting this argument would render powerless any attempts to use dialogic approaches to facilitate children’s participation as children are less powerful than adults. That legislative change is possible however, implies that there must be some hope. Surely there is a possible place for the transformative potential of dialogue in the pressure leading to reform.

Jackson (2008), expresses some hope in her discussion of dialogic pedagogy

and social justice. Recognising that classroom practice is of limited impact on the world outside of the classroom, she argues that there is a need to hold onto possibilities that dialogic teaching might have to offer individual students within the educational context. Although it would appear to be naïve about the extent of the transformative capabilities of dialogic approaches, it can be argued that they offer interesting possibilities for those engaged in participatory practices with children both at a practical and a philosophical level. In the light of the potential difficulties posed by inequalities between dialogic partners, practitioners require to adopt a critically reflexive stance in their use of dialogic approaches as participatory devices.

This section has considered the possibilities offered by dialogic approaches in providing a means to genuine communication between different voices and in particular between the voices of different generations. It has also considered the transformative mechanisms of dialogic and their political limitations. The next section will consider these issues in relation to Philosophy for Children which is one approach to engaging children in dialogue and will critically explore its potential as a dialogic participatory mechanism.

SECTION 4

Philosophy for Children, dialogue and participation

4.1 Philosophy For Children as a dialogic mechanism

Having critically examined dialogic approaches and considered their potential for

participatory practice, this section will now consider whether Philosophy for Children can be conceptualised as a dialogic participatory mechanism. This will initially involve looking at whether Philosophy for Children is a genuinely dialogic approach. Given that Philosophy for Children consists ‘entirely of inducting children into dialogues’ (Wegerif, 2007, p 102), it would be expected that its status as a dialogic approach would be uncontested. Dialogism, as we have seen however involves more than engagement in dialogue.

Claims have been made about Philosophy for Children’s dialogic status (Fisher, 2007), but these have been disputed in some quarters. Vansieleghem (2005), contends that Philosophy for Children is problematic because in it is governed by a political agenda that privileges particular forms of thinking and behaviour. For Vansieleghem, this leads to the exclusion of ‘other’ voices and reproduces existing discourses. She recognises the need for a genuinely dialogical confrontation with ‘otherness’ but argues that the Socratic tradition emphasises one particular way of teaching thinking. In her view, Philosophy for Children can be approached instrumentally, and as such, can lose sight of the transformative value of experiencing the presence of the other. Philosophy for Children, according to Vansieleghem, needs to be re- interpreted dialogically as in her view, the procedure is dialectic and attempts to reach a synthesis or conclusion through the questioning process. The difficulty of distinguishing dialectic from dialogic mechanisms has already been discussed. The extent to which the dialogue allows self and other (s) to meet in a space of ongoing negotiation where dialogue remains open and difference is maintained in creative tension, is however key to dialogic understanding.

Vanseilegham's emphasis on the dangers of an instrumentalist approach to Philosophy for Children, through a procedural reliance on the Socratic method, is timely given the current explosion of interest in Philosophy for Children as a pedagogic tool. She does not however respond to Kennedy's (1999) paper on Philosophy for Children. Kennedy (1999), although recognising the Socratic approach as dialectic, conceptualises children's communities of philosophical inquiry as both dialogic and potentially transformative. For Kennedy, philosophical inquiry is teleological to the extent that follows 'the inquiry where it leads' (p346), but non-teleological in that it is not possible to predict the direction or even be sure that a direction exists. On this basis, Kennedy argues for the dialogicality of philosophical inquiry, as it is chaotic, emergent, and open. He argues that communal dialogue challenges the western tradition of philosophy as an individual, rational endeavour. Philosophy for Children, viewed from this perspective, engages children and adults in dialogue where there is 'no final closure, because of the stubborn, perdurance of the multiplicity of individual perspectives which canbe coordinated but never subsumed.' (Kennedy, 1999, p349). On this basis Philosophy for Children, can be viewed as dialogical.

Murris (2008), in a very helpful discussion of this issue, raises concern not so much with the community of inquiry model but with the potential instrumentalism of Philosophy for Children as it becomes increasingly packaged and marketed. She uses an interesting quote from Plato in which Socrates suggests that the perplexity others feel in the presence of his questioning, is actually a projection of his own perplexity. Murris's

creative use of this quote, enables her to highlight the potential dangers of the recent popularity in Philosophy for Children as a ‘method’ and encourages teachers to embrace the perplexities involved in engaging in the process. She presents the stance of the teacher as very different to that of the trained and knowing facilitator who is guiding participants towards ‘truth’. The open-endedness suggested by Murreis fits more readily with a dialogic approach. The thrust of Murreis’s argument is that in using Philosophy for Children, practitioners need to avoid easy solutions to tensions and difficulties as these are likely to close down dialogue. Examples of such tensions from the writer’s own research of primary school inquiries, include children raising potentially painful emotional issues or views being expressed which conflict with the ethical norms of the school or culture. Such tensions might create discomfort and perplexity in teacher and children but it can be argued that they offer that genuine encounter with otherness which characterise dialogic approaches.

It is important to recognise however that philosophical inquiries are socially and politically situated. The extent to which an individual teacher might tolerate ‘Socratic perplexity’ is likely to be influenced by the many factors which impact on classroom practice. Attitudes of school managers, parental influence on school and quality assurance bodies for example, are likely to influence curricular and pedagogic decisions. An individual community of inquiry therefore exists within a wider structure whose influence is likely to impact on its potential as a dialogic mechanism.

So can Philosophy for Children be conceptualised as a dialogic mechanism? It is clear from the discussion so far that this is not straightforward. While Philosophy for Children

promotes dialogue , this is not sufficient to qualify it as a dialogic mechanism. Concerns have been raised about its Socratic roots and on this basis the extent to which it can be genuinely dialogic has been questioned. The arguments of both Kennedy and Murrells however are persuasive and therefore it can be contended that Philosophy for Children can be dialogical. Practitioners need to be alert to the dangers of ‘over training’ in technique and the need to allow themselves to tolerate perplexity if philosophical inquiries are to be dialogical. This requires a process of ongoing reflexivity. The current favouring of dialogue as pedagogy, as discussed in section two, may muddy the waters for those attempting to use Philosophy for Children in a genuinely dialogical way. Its use in schools is likely to locate it among a range of competing agendas such as attainment raising or the development of citizenship skills. Those attempting to employ Philosophy for Children in a dialogic fashion need to be very clear in their aims. The potentially unsettling experiences of teachers engaging with children in this process may be supported through dialogic encounters with fellow teachers. Ongoing support is likely to be required to enable the practitioner to retain a critical gaze on the process if it is to operate dialogically. The nature of that support needs to be very carefully considered.

4.2 Philosophy for Children as a participatory mechanism

The question of the dialogicality of Philosophy for Children, appears to have received more direct treatment in the literature than that of its participatory potential. Philosophy for Children’s educative function for future participation has certainly been recognised.

Fisher (2003), refers to its role in the development of the ‘the future transformers’ (p11) of the world. This future orientation appears to place Philosophy for Children, in Biesta’s (2006), categorisation as education *for*, or *through* democracy. This paper is primarily concerned with participation in the present and the extent to which suggestions such as those of Todd (2007), that Philosophy for Children might be a vehicle of ‘authentic participation’ are reasonable.

The position taken in this paper, is that participatory approaches should be a means of involving children in transformative action in the present. A dialogic perspective, as argued above, may avoid the difficulties inherent in both objectivist and relativist approaches to children’s voice. Dialogic theory offers the potential of a genuine meeting of self and other and contains transformative potential (Markova, 2003). This position also underpins van der Reit’s (2008), analysis of the role of dialogue in participatory research where it is the meeting of self and other allows both an empathic and a distanced perspective. For her, genuine dialogue involves a dialectical relationship between these two perspectives which provides the means for developing critical reflection. For van der Reit, this is the epistemological catalyst for transformation and it is both participants and researcher who are subject to transformation. It is possible to argue that the extent to which Philosophy for Children is practiced in a way which is genuinely dialogical, where there is a genuine encounter with ‘otherness’ for all involved in the process, will determine the extent to which it is genuinely participatory. Further, it may be argued that where the process is dialogical that it offers opportunities to develop and practice skills which will enable children’s participation in the future. This future orientation however is different to approaches discussed in section two which

rest on an asymmetrical pupil-teacher relationship where teachers scaffold the development of specific skills. Rather it is the experience of the dialogic process itself which will allow children to participate in the present and at the same time practice skills which will have value for their future participation.

It is clear that that Philosophy for Children, as described in the literature, unlike participatory research approaches (O’Kane, 2000), does not necessarily have a praxis dimension. It is currently most often associated with developing thinking skills (McGuiness, 2005). Its emphasis on logical, rational thought may limit its participatory potential. As such, it cannot fulfil O’Kane’s (2000) criteria for participatory methods because it has no focus on support for further action. Here critical theory’s breach of the modernist distinction between knowledge and practice (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) might be helpful. It is possible that a *praxis* orientation could be developed by a community of inquiry. For Kennedy, allowing children to enter philosophical dialogue offers transformative possibilities for philosophy itself. Breaching the thinking and praxis divide might be one such possibility and this is worthy of further exploration.

4.3 Philosophy for Children, participation and equality

The difficulty of power differentials between children and between children and adults, is the final issue to be considered when examining Philosophy for Children’s potential as both a dialogic and a participatory mechanism. This problem is not unique to

Philosophy for Children as we have seen. The issues here are similar to those raised by Jackson (2008), who discusses dialogic teaching as a route to social justice. It is Jackson's contention that ground rules for classroom talk privilege one sort of discourse over others, as those children most confident in privileged forms of discourse are more able to subtly subvert the rules. There are links here with Bernstein's emphasis on the ways in which voices are reproduced in the classroom. This has direct relevance to Philosophy for Children where rules of engagement are generally established as part of the process (Fisher, 2003). Jackson discusses approaches taken by those who have attempted to silence the voice of the privileged and raise the voice of the marginalized in their classrooms as a means to overcome these issues. In her view, this is problematic for a number of reasons, including the need for the teacher to make assumptions about privilege on the basis of appearance. Like Arnot and Reay (2007), she adopts the position that changing classroom talk cannot tackle structural inequality leaving practitioners who recognise the impact of such inequalities in a quandary. Jackson however suggests that awareness of these dilemmas enables practitioners to consider the possibility of 'there being better and worse actions one can take as a conscientious educator.' (p144). In accepting this, it is important to avoid instrumentalist attempts to resolve such issues. This further reinforces the need for practitioner reflexivity. Perhaps those adopting dialogical approaches to their own professional development and support might develop and maintain the critical reflexivity needed to operate as 'conscientious educators'.

SECTION FIVE

Conclusion

This paper has considered two key issues, the contribution of dialogic approaches to participatory practices with children and the extent to which Philosophy for Children can be conceptualised as a dialogic, participatory tool which can support such practices. The paper has explored links between participation and dialogue, and conceptualisations of dialogue in order to address these questions. It has been argued that dialogic approaches offer a way through the philosophical problems encountered by both objectivism and extreme relativist approaches to the 'voices' of the children. Dialogic approaches it is contended, provide a means to genuine communication between different voices and the voices of different generations. The transformative mechanisms which underpin dialogic approaches have been argued to have particular significance to those seeking to work in participatory ways with children. Dialogic approaches are however politically situated and dialogic partners are not necessarily equally powerful. These factors may impose limits on the transformative potential of any dialogic approach and those working in the sphere need to be realistic in their expectations and responsible in how they communicate these to the children with whom they work.

Where practitioners wish to use Philosophy for Children as a dialogic, participatory tool, it is concluded that they must be able to tolerate the potential perplexity and discomfort of genuinely open dialogue. This being the case, Philosophy for Children it has been argued, can be regarded as dialogic. School based work however is likely to be challenging given the various competing agendas operating in schools. It has been

further argued that Philosophy for Children's emphasis on thinking, limits its participatory potential. This might be overcome if a praxis focus can be developed within a community of inquiry.

Dialogic approaches offer exciting possibilities which extend well beyond the enhancement of children's learning experiences. Dialogic offers the potential to provide a way out of the philosophical difficulties presented by the literature on 'voice'. Further, dialogism appears to have transformative potential, albeit limited by the political contexts within which dialogic practices take place. Philosophy for Children, can be viewed as a dialogic approach and with the caveats mentioned above, might support participatory practice. Fielding (2004), suggests that change requires a shift of what being a pupil and a teacher actually means. Philosophy for Children, if it maintains Murrell's notion of 'Socratic perplexity', arguably has the potential to contribute to this shift in perspective and may well enable what Fielding refers to as a 'rupture the ordinary' (Fielding, 2004, p 296).

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